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Spotlighting Teen Issues

**for
Parents**

Tobacco Use

Whitney Danhof, Agent - Bedford County, UT Extension

Every day in the United States, approximately 4,000 youths aged 12 – 17 try their first cigarette. Will your child be next?

Smoking and tobacco use among young people is a serious issue that can affect their health and life expectancy. Among high school students, 22 percent report current cigarette use while 10 percent of high school males use smokeless tobacco. Talking to your children about tobacco use and being involved in their lives will help you prevent them from becoming smokers or smokeless tobacco users. Here are some tips to help you.

Consequences of Tobacco Use

- The nicotine in tobacco is extremely addictive. The younger people are when they start smoking, the more likely they are to develop a long-term addiction.
- Youth who use tobacco may cough and have more asthma attacks and respiratory problems. Smokers suffer from shortness of breath almost three times more often than nonsmokers. Smoking can cause serious lung diseases. More than 7 million current and former smokers suffer from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), the name used to describe both chronic bronchitis and emphysema. The late stage of chronic lung disease is one of the most miserable of all medical conditions. It causes a feeling of gasping for breath all the time — similar to the sensation of drowning.
- Tobacco use accounts for about one-third of all cancer deaths in the United States. Smoking causes almost 90 percent of all lung cancer. Smoking also causes cancers of the larynx (voice box), oral cavity, pharynx (throat) and esophagus and contributes to the development of cancers of the bladder, pancreas, cervix, kidney and stomach.
- Smoking reduces life expectancy by approximately 14 years.
- Short-term effects of smoking include reduced ability to run and be athletic because of shortness of breath and constriction of circulation. Hair and clothes trap the smoky smell, which is difficult to remove. Stained teeth and bad breath are unattractive.
- How Do I Talk to My Child About Smoking?
- Despite the impact of movies, music and TV, you can be the greatest influence in your child's life. Talk to your child and make your views and expectations regarding tobacco clear.
- Start young. Conversations about tobacco should start at about age 5 or 6 and continue through high school. Many children start using tobacco by age 11 and many of these are addicted by age 14.



- Talk about the risks of tobacco use. While long-term effects are important, most young people find it hard to picture themselves older. Instead, focus on the shorter-term effects, such as limited athletic ability, the smell, stained teeth, etc.

- If you have friends or relatives who died from or are suffering from tobacco-related illnesses, let your child know. Use them as examples in your conversation.

- Know whether your teens have friends who smoke. Talk about peer pressure and how to respond to tough situations. Give your child some specific responses to use when refusing an offer of tobacco, such as “I want stay in shape for football,” or “I don’t want to smell like smoke for my date tonight.” Give them permission to use you as an excuse by saying, “My parents don’t approve of smoking.” Use positive peer pressure by pointing out classmates your child admires who don’t use tobacco.
- Don’t forget to point out the monetary cost of smoking. Talk about the things they could buy with the money instead of tobacco.



For More Information

American Cancer Society
www.cancer.org

American Heart Association
www.amhrt.org

American Lung Association
www.lungusa.org

National Cancer Institute Cancer Information Service
www.cancer.gov

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov/tobacco

Medline Plus (U.S. National Library of Medicine and National Institutes of Health)
www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/smoking.html

References

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Summary of findings from the 2001 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse: Volume II. Technical appendices and selected data tables. Rockville, Maryland: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2002;NHSDA Series H-18;DHHS publication no. (SMA) 02-3759.

Grunbaum, J.A., L. Kann, S.A. Kinchen, J.G. Ross, J. Hawkins, R. Lowry, et al. Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States, 2003. *Morbidity & Mortality Weekly Report* 2004; 53(SS-2):1-95.

Parents — Help Keep Your Kids Tobacco-Free. Centers for Disease Control, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. at http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/educational_materials/youthfax1.htm#Parents

Raising Kids Who Don't Smoke. Vol.2: Issue 1. Youth Smoking Prevention, Philip Morris USA. at <http://www.philipmorrisusa.com/en/prc/activities/downloadresources.asp>

When Is a Good Time to Talk?

- Make talking to your child about tobacco a natural part of conversation. Talk while you are doing something else together.
- Use natural openings, such as seeing a character on TV smoking or talking about the cost while shopping.
- Talk while performing daily routines such as riding in the car, eating dinner or while saying goodnight at bedtime.

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